

A New Vision for Freeway Park

Executive Summary

*Prepared by Project for Public Spaces, Inc.
for Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Freeway Park Neighborhood Association
January 2005*



The Freeway Park community input process has generated many good suggestions which form the basis of the report "A New Vision for Freeway Park," prepared by Project for Public Spaces for the Freeway Park Neighborhood Association and Seattle Parks and Recreation. The next phase of the project will require the Freeway Park Client Group and others to make critical decisions about several issues. These issues range from exploring the financial and legal feasibility of incorporating food-related uses into the park, to determining the most appropriate management structure for the park, to identifying the willingness of the owners of buildings adjacent to the park to implement changes so that they better relate to it, to designing and constructing physical improvements that will support the community's ideas for activation both in the short and long term. The implementation of the improvements will require many different skills, including events planning and coordination, maintenance, horticulture planning and landscape architecture.

To improve people's perceptions of Freeway Park, short-term changes should be focused in two primary areas in the park: the plaza adjacent to the Convention Center; and the entrance, fountain and plaza area adjacent to the Park Plaza building. In addition, the proposed walking loop in the park, enhanced by seasonal plantings, artwork, signage and possibly lighting, would help to improve both use and perception of the park immediately. If physical and programmatic changes are made to draw people and activity to these key areas, the park areas between them will not seem so far removed and the perceptions and safety will be improved in them as well. In the medium term, as the design and management programs for the park evolve, changes can be made to other areas including park entrances, Pigott Corridor and to the area around the restroom building. In the long term, the vision of creating a central open space or lawn in the park by either removing the 8th Avenue overpass altogether or lowering it and allowing limited access through the park to Union Street at grade, should continue to be explored.

VISION

The overall vision that came out of the community and stakeholder meetings is that while the park should continue to be an “urban oasis,” this tranquility should be balanced with more activities and attractions that would begin to turn the park into a city-wide destination. The edges of the park, in particular, should be enhanced with major visible anchors to attract visitors and create a positive image for the park.

ISSUES

Many issues need to be addressed for the park to be a success. Today the park is little used, even on nice days, and many people perceive it to be unsafe both day and night. Sightlines through and into the park are poor in many areas, especially at the park’s entrances. The connections between the park and adjacent buildings, which could provide “eyes on the park,” are poor. Amenities that help people navigate their way through the park, such as signage, lighting and well-located focal points, are limited. And finally, the park does not have an adequately funded management program.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The many recommendations that were generated by stakeholders and community members during the planning process have been categorized into short, medium and long term. The following is a summary of these recommendations.

- **Begin to implement changes now.** Using the list of short-term improvements that are outlined in the report, an action plan should be developed. This will not only make the park function more effectively and draw new users, but it will also give funders and others the confidence that their ideas are being heard and acted on. Short-term improvements include such things as opening up sightlines in several location, developing a program of events (e.g. the “Out to Lunch” program), instituting the “Walk around the Park” as a way to improve park users’ feeling of safety, as well as adding a variety of amenities to accommodate and encourage new activity, such as movable chairs, kiosks, tables and umbrellas, and portable games in areas like the Convention Center and Park Plaza.
- **Improve and open up all entrances to the park.** Although all entrances should be improved, special attention should be given to the 7th Avenue and Union Street entrance near the Convention Center, the 6th Avenue and Seneca Street entrance, and at both the top and bottom of the Pigott Corridor.
- **Improve lighting, signage and planting throughout the park.** To increase the use of the park as a place to walk in and through, pedestrian lighting should be added along all major pathways (replacing the existing highway-style lighting), and to highlight dramatic features such as Canyon fountain, the trees along Pigott Corridor, seasonal plantings, etc. Directional signs and a map of the area should be added at park entrances and at every major intersection in the park. Attractive seasonal planting displays should be added along all major paths

and at key areas and entrances to reinforce the new positive image of the park as a place to go and to walk.

- **Determine the economic feasibility of incorporating different types of food-related operations in Freeway Park.** In the short term, food-related operations could simply consist of vending carts but in the long term, they could involve adding a semi-permanent structure in the Convention Center Plaza and in Park Place Plaza (near Canyon Fountain), and/or retrofitting the restrooms/parking garage entry in the center of the park into a café. Feasibility studies are needed to determine the economic potential of these ideas. In undertaking this analysis, existing operators such as the Convention Center food concessionaire should be consulted. They may be interested in operating there as a way of establishing a broader presence in the park.
- **Explore options for managing the park in the future.** The report summarized several possible park management models. Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Freeway Park Client Group now need to determine which form of management is appropriate for the park. This involves prioritizing the community's recommendations for the short, medium and long term, and then determining which of these recommendations can be taken on by existing organizations with and without additional funding. The management-related activities that no existing organization wishes or is able to undertake would become the responsibility of either a new organizational entity or the expansion of an existing entity. A public / private partnership of some type will likely result from this study, but the exact nature of the partnership will need to be determined through an in-depth analysis in the next phase of this project.
- **Determine the type of development opportunities that could occur adjacent to the park.** The Client Group and other stakeholders should encourage surrounding buildings to link the park more closely. The Jensonia Hotel site is a great opportunity for a new building that is positively linked to the park. The development of sites along 6th Avenue south of Seneca Street should also be explored as a way of getting additional funds for park management and improvement and as a way to fulfill Halprin's original vision of extending the park south.

This report represents the beginning of a community-wide conversation about the future of Freeway Park. The questions that need to be addressed include: how to balance the need for activity and safety in the park with its existing character and design, given the recommendations outlined in this report; how to make the park usable at different times of day and in different weather conditions; how to maximize use of the park's sunny areas; which shaded areas should be opened up to encourage additional uses and improve the image of the park as a safe place; and finally, how to manage and fund the park to ensure its continued success.